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BY PAT PITZER

A BRIDGE BETWEEN HAWAII'S PAST AND PRESENT, MARY KAWENA PUKUI CROWNS HER MANY ACHIEVEMENTS WITH A NEW BOOK OF HAWAIIAN WIT AND WISDOM

DAUGHTER OF TWO CULTURES, MARY KAWENA PUKUI GREW UP KNOWING BOTH. STEEPED FROM earliest childhood in the Hawaiian traditions by her grandmother in the remote region of Ka'u on the island of Hawaii, she later was nurtured in the bilingual, bicultural home of her Hawaiian mother and New England father. Her unique background and upbringing, combined with her boundless curiosity, keen intelligence and remarkably retentive memory, have enabled her to be a bridge across time and language, preserving and passing along the lore of Old Hawaii.

Kawena—as she is affectionately known—has made a great contribution as a *kumu*, a source. Recognized today as the leading authority on Hawaiian culture and language, she has been acclaimed as an outstanding scholar, researcher, translator, author, teacher, hula expert, chanter, composer and genealogist. Her knowledge of things Hawaiian is profound, her insights perceptive, and her sharing of them, throughout her lifetime, has been in the true Hawaiian spirit of unfettered generosity.

Now 88 and in fragile health, she has yet another gift to share. It is a gift of remembered treasures and collected verbal gems accumulated over 50 years and brought together for the first time in the book *'Olelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings*. Published this month by the Bishop Museum Press, the book is Kawena Pukui's masterwork, a treasury of nearly 3,000 proverbs and sayings. Most of them have never been in print before, but were handed down the Hawaiian way, by oral tradition. The book, illustrated by the strong, expressive prints of Big Island artist Dietrich Varez, is a keepsake. For Kawena, it is the fruit of a labor of love that began in 1910 when, at the age of 15, she started writing down the sayings of her Hawaiian mother and grandmother. Her collection of sayings and proverbs continued to grow over the decades as she translated Hawaiian works, wrote about the culture and language, and, in her long association with the Bishop Museum, traveled throughout the Islands talking to Hawaiian elders.

Excerpts from *'Olelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings*:

He ho'okele wa'a no ka lā 'ino.

A canoe steersman for a stormy day.

A courageous person.

Aia i Kōloa.

Is at Kōloa.

A play on *kō* (drawn) and *loa* (long)—drawn a long way under. Drunk.

Left: Mary Kawena Pukui, at 19, had already begun translating Hawaiian lore and collecting sayings.
Below: For many happy and productive years, she worked at Bishop Museum.

Photographs courtesy of Bishop Museum

He mālolo.

A flying fish.

A person who goes from lover to lover.

Keikei kūlana hale-wili, ʻaʻohe mea hana o loko.

A fine-looking mill, but no machinery inside.

Good-looking but unintelligent. Taken from a *hula* song.

He manu hulu.

A feathered bird.

A prosperous person.

He makani Kona, ke ku la ke aʻe i ka moana.

It is the Kona wind, for the sprays are flying at sea.

Said of a raging temper.

At age 6, Kawena returned to her parents' home, following the death of her Hawaiian grandmother, who raised her during her early years.

The proverbs and sayings reveal the Hawaiians' delight in figurative speech, metaphor, plays on words and the *kaona* or hidden meaning. Always there is a message, the "seed within the flower of speech," as Kawena once put it. The sayings cast light on customs, attitudes and values, and provide insight into the Hawaiian mind and imagination. Pungent proverbs, artful insult and poetic imagery blend here, in vivid testimony that the Hawaiians were unusually observant—of human nature as well as nature itself.

To preserve the expressive sayings of the Hawaiian people and to share them are the purposes of the book, as, throughout her lifetime in a rapidly changing Hawaii, she has sought to perpetuate the lore, legends, chants, hulas and language that form the rich Hawaiian cultural heritage.

She is a living link between the old and the new Hawaii. Her qualities of mind and spirit and her unusual background made her the ideal person for this role.

Born April 20, 1895, in the rugged region of Kaʻu on the Big Island, Mary Abigail Kawena Wiggin was the only child of Paʻahana Kanakaʻole and Henry Nathaniel Wiggin. Her mother, descended from a long line of *kahuna* (priests) going back for centuries, was herself a healing *kahuna*. Her father, from a distinguished Salem, Mass., shipping family of the clipper ship days, was a descendant of 17th-century Massachusetts Bay Colony governor Simon Bradstreet and his wife, poet Anne Bradstreet.

Kawena's full Hawaiian name is a lengthy one: Kawena-ʻula-o-ka-lani-a-Hiʻiaka-i-ka-poli-o-Pele-ka-wahine-ʻai-honua Na-lei-lehua-a-Pele. She translates it as "The rosy glow in the sky made by Hiʻiaka in the bosom of Pele, the earth-consuming woman. The crimson lehua wreaths of Pele." The name connotes ancestral ties to Pele, the fiery volcano goddess. As descendants of the Pele line, the family was allowed to use the name of the goddess, and Kawena's forebears' bones were consigned to the volcano.

Her great-grandmother, Keliʻipaʻahana, who was a priestess of Pele and was skilled in the art of hula, was the last of her line to have her bones taken at night to the crater and thrown into the fire pit. While this sounds like something from the ancient past, it actually happened during the last half of the last century. Wrote Kawena: "This was after Christianity had come. But because we're related to the fire—the line of Pele—great-grandmother's people took her secretly, after the flesh was removed from the bones. They wrapped the bones and took her to the Halemaumau fire pit of Kilauea Crater and chanted and prayed and let her go happily to her people who were fire."

This priestess of Pele had married a chief of the I family called Kanakaʻole. They had one daughter, Naliʻipoʻaimoku, called Poʻai, born in 1830. It was Poʻai, Kawena's grandmother, who was to have a far-reaching effect on her early years.

Poʻai's father died when she was an infant and her mother married Kanekuhia, a priest of Lono who had been in training in the temple of Lono at Kealakekua Bay when Capt. Cook was there in 1779. So Poʻai grew up with the traditions, rituals and chants of the priestly line of Lono on her stepfather's side and of Pele on her mother's. She was trained as a healing *kahuna* and as a young woman also was a dancer and chanter in the court of Queen Emma. She married a cousin, Kanakaʻole, who was a master canoe builder as well as a famed healing *kahuna*.

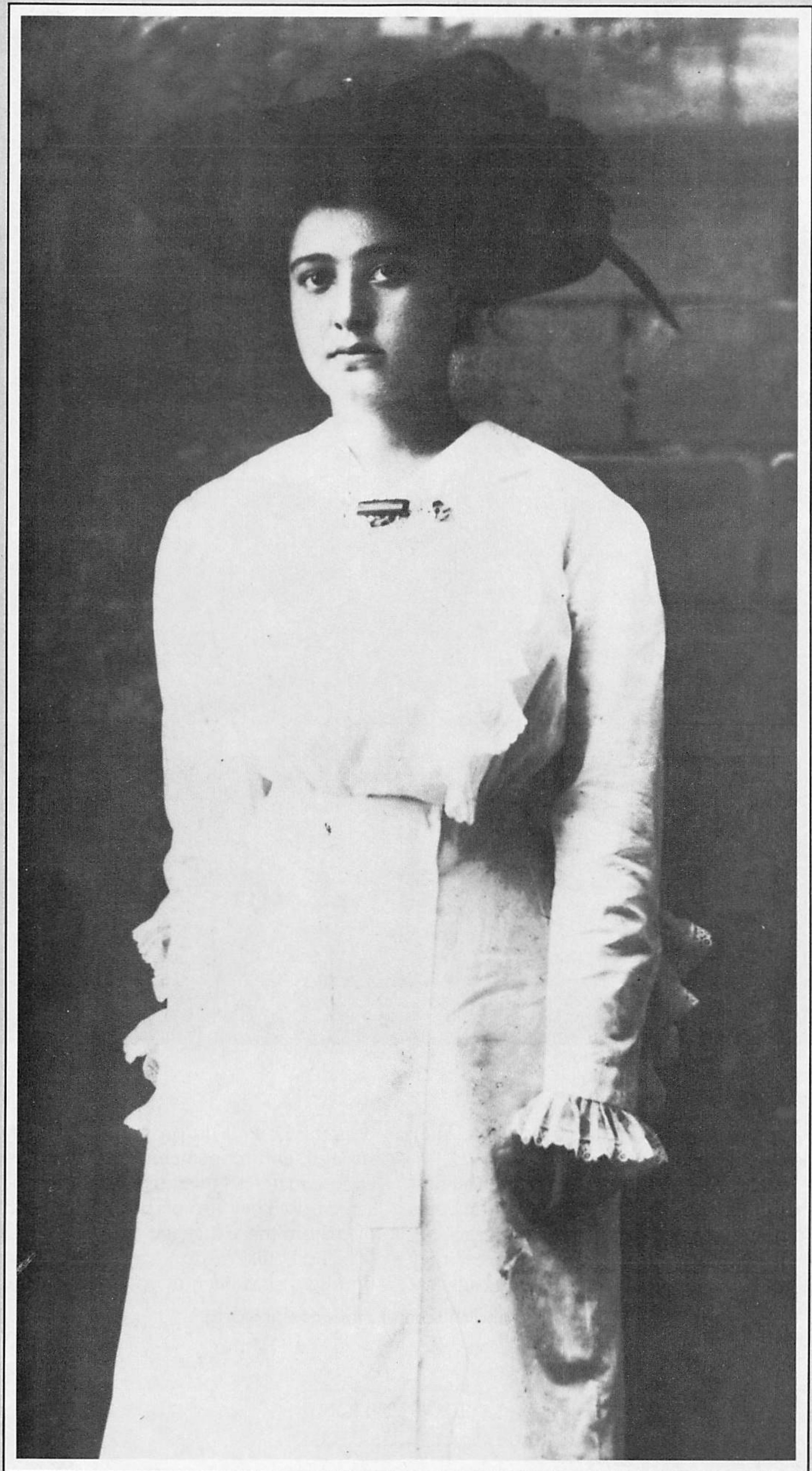
In the remote, country district of Kaʻu, traditions were strong and change came slowly. There is an old Kaʻu saying: "Our proud heritage is that of the *ʻohana* [family] of Kaʻu. We are like the *ʻaʻaliʻi* shrub, which holds fast with its roots to the rocky soil of the homeland, whatever winds may blow."

As the winds of change were blowing over the rest of Hawaii with the coming of Christianity, Kaʻu, with few canoe landings and difficult land access, was one of the last regions of the Islands to be influenced by the missionaries. The ruggedly individualistic folk of Kaʻu clung to their ways of old and their melodious Hawaiian language. Kawena's grandparents, who had 15 children, raised their family in a nearly undiluted atmosphere of Old Hawaii.

Their daughter, Paʻahana, named for her grandmother, the Pele priestess, married Henry Wiggin, who had come to Kaʻu in 1892 to be head *luna* (overseer) for a sugar plantation. Even after the overthrow of the monarchy, a year after his arrival, many country Hawaiians still held fast to their traditional customs.

One custom that still prevailed was that of *hanai*, of giving the grandparents the first-born grandchild to raise as a *punahele* or favored child. The word derives from *puna* (spring or source) and *hele* (that which continues, goes on) and means a child chosen by the grandparents to be raised in a special manner and trained in the family lore, history, rituals and genealogy. The *punahele* became the family's "living history book," the one to carry on the knowledge to future generations.

As Poʻai's older sons and daughters had their first-born child, each time she asked for the child to be raised as a *punahele*, but the babies' parents refused, saying they wished to raise their own children. By the time Kawena was born in 1895, Poʻai, who assisted at the birth as midwife, had almost given up hope. But



E uhi wale no ʻaʻole e nalo,
he imu puhi.

No matter how much one covers a steaming imu, *the smoke will rise.*

The secret will get out.

He ipu kāʻeo.

A full calabash.

A knowledgeable person. Also expressed ʻ*Umeke kāʻeo.*

Hoʻi i Kālia i ka ʻai ʻalamihi.

Gone to Kālia to eat ʻalamihi *crabs.*

He is in a repentant mood. A play on ʻ*ala-mihi* (path-of-repentance). Kālia, Oʻahu, is a place where ʻ*alamihi* crabs were once plentiful.

Hōhonu no ke kawa.

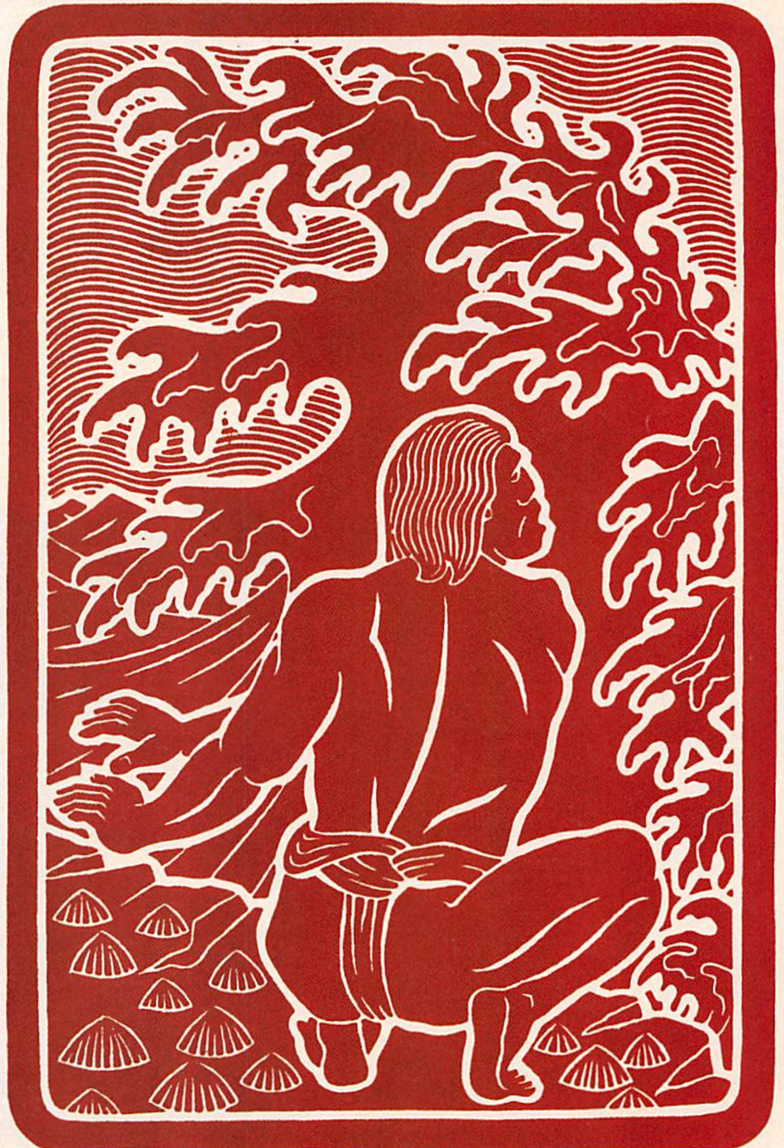
A deep diving place indeed.

A topic that requires deep thinking.

He māʻukaʻuka hoe hewa.

An uplander, unskilled in wielding the paddle.

Said of an awkward person who blunders along, or of a man who is clumsy in lovemaking.



I kani no ka pahu i ka ʻolohaka o loko.

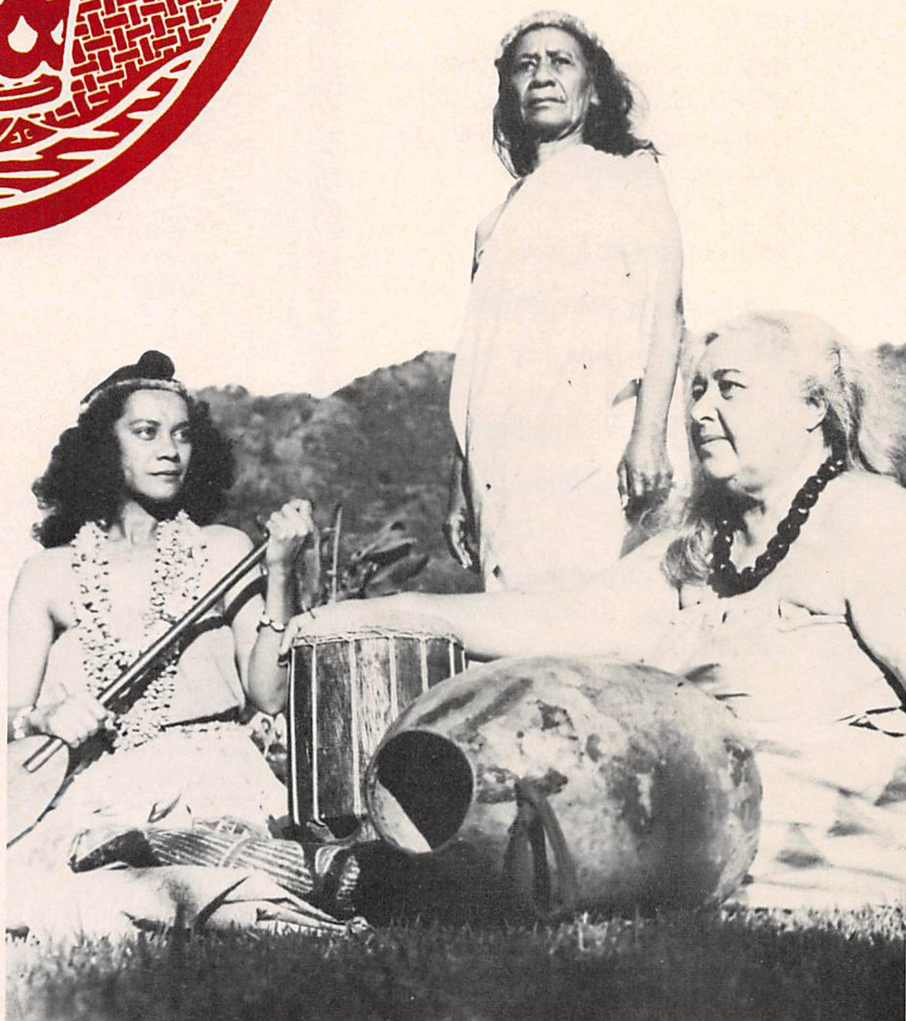
It is the space inside that gives the drum its sound.

It is the empty-headed one who does the most talking.

ʻAʻohe ulu ka hoi.

The hoi *vine does not grow.*

There is no interest in that. Said by one who lacks interest, or is bored with what is being said or done. A play on *hoi* (bitter yam) and *hoihoi* (interest).



A renowned kumu hula *and chanter, Kawena Pukui (right) is pictured in 1947 with her hula student, Iolani Luahine (left), who went on to become a famed dancer, and chanter Malia Kau.*

still she asked, "Is this child mine?" Much to her—and everyone else's—surprise, it was her *haole* son-in-law who said yes, she could have the baby to raise as her *hanai* child in the Hawaiian manner. To his startled wife, Henry Wiggin explained that Po'ai was old and had few years left, so let the child make them happy ones for her. Eventually they would have their daughter back.

Many times in her later life, Kawena expressed her gratitude for this generous act of her father's—an act that afforded her an extraordinary opportunity to absorb Hawaiian language, customs and culture.

As soon as she was weaned, at about a year old, Kawena went to live with Po'ai at her home on a hill overlooking the town of Naalehu. Here, on land that had belonged to her family for generations, she spent her early years being raised in the traditional Hawaiian way, speaking Hawaiian and learning ancient rituals, chants, hulas, legends and sayings, along with the family genealogy.

While Po'ai had a frame house, with a kitchen and bedrooms added on by Kawena's father, she seldom used the big koa beds or the kitchen, preferring instead to live in the old style, doing her cooking outdoors, storing her food in calabashes slung from the rafters, and sleeping on mats on the floor.

Even in the 1890s, much of Old Hawaii still lingered in Ka'u, and particularly in Po'ai. Though she had converted to Christianity, Po'ai didn't let that change her ways much. Instead of abandoning the gods of her ancestors, she merely added Jehovah to the top of the list.

Kawena's childhood memories include hearing her grandmother, each sunrise and sunset, voicing an ancient chant of praise to Pele. In times of drought, Po'ai chanted to Lono for rain, and before she and Kawena left the house to go anywhere, she chanted to the *'aumakua*, the ancestral guardian gods, to protect the home. Kawena learned the chants and memorized the names of her family's 50 *'aumakua*. She helped her grandmother and other healing *kahuna* relatives by gathering medicinal plants and herbs, learning the appropriate rituals and chants that accompanied their gathering and use. Later, as an adult, she would collaborate on a book on Hawaiian medicinal plants and practices.

Po'ai's training of Kawena was in the traditional pattern: a respected elder as teacher and the spoken or chanted word as text. The imagery of the chants and sayings helped her as a child to acquire a sensitivity to the rich, many-layered Hawaiian language. Even after the missionaries brought the printed word to the Islands, country Hawaiians of the turn of the century still relied on the chant to learn everything from genealogy and legends to arithmetic. As an adult, Kawena still recalled a delightful chant in Hawaiian that taught her the multiplication tables.

Grandmother and granddaughter were inseparable and, though she saw her parents often, it was Po'ai's influence that shaped her early years. As her grandmother's constant companion, the little girl learned by observing, imitating and asking questions. An inquisitive child with an insatiable curiosity about everything, she was forever asking questions, seeking to learn more. It was a trait she never lost, as she laughingly admitted some six decades later.

As a *punahele*, Kawena was fondly cared for, but she also was expected to absorb an awesome amount of learning. Being a *punahele* was an apprenticeship for her future adult role as the one selected to perpetuate the family history and traditions and to be the source of guidance, troubleshooter and peace keeper for the *'ohana*.

Even as a small child in her grandmother's home, she participated in *ho'oponopono*, the traditional Hawaiian version of family therapy, which may well be one of the most effective means ever devised to restore and maintain family harmony. At this gathering, mediated by the family senior, the family members pray, discuss their conflicts, and the member who has wronged another admits it, offers restitution and asks forgiveness, which is given mutually, freeing both the wrongdoer and the wronged from lingering guilts and grudges. It could be preventive as well as remedial. Held routinely, as it was in Kawena's family, it prevented small antagonisms from escalating. Kawena grew up with the practice as conducted by her grandmother and mother and, later, *ho'oponopono* became a regular part of family life for her own children.

In her later years, she was also to introduce this concept, with beneficial results, to social workers dealing with troubled Hawaiian families.

The experience of living with her grandmother during her early years instilled in Kawena's retentive mind an astonishing store of knowledge of Hawaiian traditions and customs, even as young as she was.

From the death of her grandmother, when Kawena was 6, she lived with her parents, who proceeded with her upbringing in a thoroughly bicultural, bilingual home with equal emphasis on Hawaiian and English. Her father, while fluent in Hawaiian, spoke to her only in English, her mother spoke to her only in Hawaiian.

Her father regaled young Kawena with tales of Paul Revere, Ichabod

Continued on page 178

He ʻupena nae; ʻaʻohe iʻa hei ʻole.

It is a fine-meshed net; there is no fish that it does not fail to catch.

Said of a woman who never fails to attract the opposite sex.

Ka ʻōpuʻu pua i mōhala.

A flower that began to unfold.

A baby.

I Kahiki ka ua, ako ʻē ka hale.

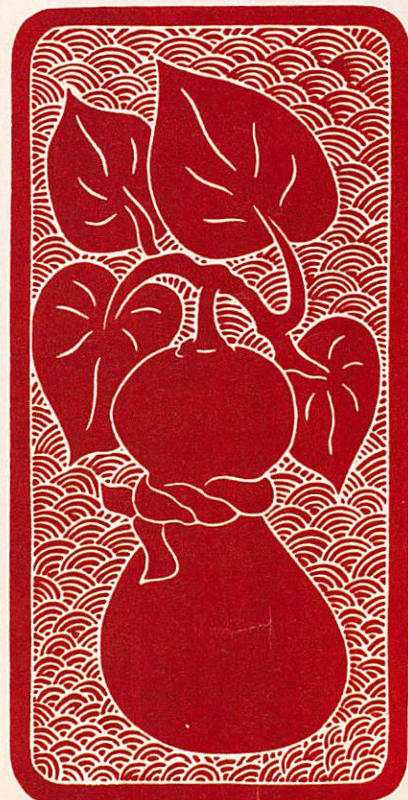
While the rain is still far away, thatch the house.

Be prepared.

Ua lilo i ke koli kukui a maluhi.

Gone lamp-trimming until tired.

Said of one who has gone on an all-night spree. When the top *kukui* nut on a candle was burned out, it was knocked off and the next nut on the stick allowed to burn.



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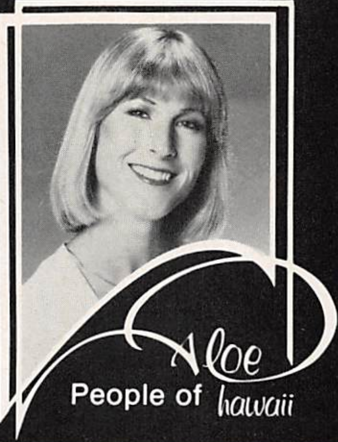

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Pukui

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Crane and Rip Van Winkle and readings from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ralph Waldo Emerson. This not only enriched her background in the English language, but also gave her a sense of the New England side of her dual heritage, though, throughout her life, she has never left the Islands.

Her mother, Pa'ahana, meanwhile, continued in Grandmother Po'ai's footsteps, teaching her daughter her knowledge of Hawaiian culture and lore.

Times were changing and the beautiful Hawaiian language was becoming endangered, as English supplanted it as the required language of instruction in Island schools.

It is ironic that Kawena, who one day would write the definitive Hawaiian dictionary and would contribute greatly to the appreciation of the Hawaiian language, was subjected to punishment for speaking it in school. When she was in her teens, the family moved to Honolulu, where Kawena enrolled in a private school. One day, as she was explaining something in Hawaiian to a youngster who was having difficulty with English, the teacher overheard and sternly reprimanded and punished her. Even years later as an adult, Kawena still recalled the hurt and humiliation.

Her parents, standing firm in their conviction that their daughter should speak both Hawaiian and English, promptly withdrew her from the school. Her parents' staunch advocacy of bilingualism was to play a major role in the future direction her life's work would take.

Despite her eagerness for learning, when she was 15 she interrupted her high school education to help care for a seriously ill uncle. It was about this time that a neighbor, Laura Green, from a Maui missionary family, recognized the young girl's knowledge of Hawaiian culture and her talent for translating complex Hawaiian thought into English. At her urging, Kawena began translating and writing down stories and chants she had learned in Hawaiian from her grandmother and mother. Starting with those of her *'ohana*, she also began collecting and translating Hawaiian sayings, an activity that was to continue for many years and eventually culminate in the book *'Olelo No'eau*.

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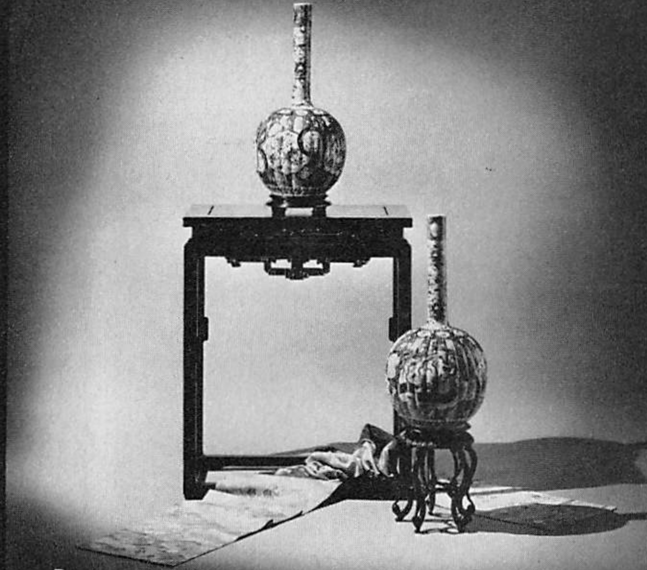

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In 1913, when she was 18, she married a pure Hawaiian named Kaloli'i Pukui. Four years later, when Queen Liliuokalani died, he was one of the kahili bearers at her funeral. Chanting for that occasion was a cousin of Kawena's mother, whom the family often visited at his home in Kalihi. One day he sent for Kawena and told her to sit in a chair on his lanai facing the Bishop Museum. "Someday you will work in that building," he said. Considering herself unqualified, the young woman protested. "Don't contradict me," came the response. "You will work there." And eventually she would, for many productive years.

Was the chanter prophetic? Perhaps. Or perhaps, as a relative, he had observed Kawena's interests and talents and knew that from infancy she had absorbed Hawaiian traditions and from her teens had translated and written Hawaiian material. So he may have seen her future with the museum as a natural continuation of the path she had already begun to travel.

Not until she had been married for five years did Kawena resume her studies, graduating from the Hawaiian Mission Academy at the age of 28. All the while, she continued translating and writing.

Laura Green, meanwhile, wrote to her cousin, folklorist Martha Beckwith, a professor at Vassar College, praising Kawena's work and marveling that one so young had acquired so much knowledge. From this came the publication in 1923 of Kawena's translations, *Hawaiian Stories and Wise Sayings*, edited by Beckwith.

About five years later, the Kalihi chanter's predictions came true, as Kawena began her long association with the Bishop Museum, on an informal basis, assisting Martha Beckwith in translating Hawaiian newspapers and manuscripts.

Her translating skills impressed museum ethnologist E.S. Craighill Handy, who asked her assistance on a book on Hawaiian medicinal plants and practices. In addition to translating materials, Kawena contributed her own considerable knowledge on the subject, from the teachings of her *kahuna* family members.

The congenial collaboration was to continue. In 1935, Handy, his wife, Elizabeth, and Kawena undertook a lengthy field trip to Kawena's home island of Hawaii to interview Hawaiian elders.

Interviewing traditional-minded Hawaiians had to be done with tact, as Kawena well understood, having been raised with the old Hawaiian values. The asking of personal questions about family was considered the height of rudeness and answering them was a serious breach of family privacy. The Hawaiians had two vivid expressions, "bleaching the bones of the ancestors in the sun" and "stripping the flesh from the bones" (once both actual burial practices) to describe talking too freely about one's ancestors or one's living relatives to outsiders.

Knowing the traditional Hawaiian resistance to answering questions from outsiders, Kawena's mother, Pa'ahana, cleared the way by "adopting" the Handys and spreading the word along the Big Island grapevine that they were part of the family. This opened doors to older members of the *'ohana* and their friends around the island. Any remaining reluctance on the interviewees' part was immediately dispelled by Kawena, whose friendly manner and sensitivity to the Hawaiian language and ways won them over.

With the Handys sleeping in a station wagon and Kawena bunking out in a tent, the trio traversed the regions of Ka'u, Puna, Hilo and Kona, talking to elder Hawaiians living on their traditional lands. The trip enabled them to salvage much Hawaiian history and knowledge that was in danger of being lost as the older generation died.

From their field work came the books *The Hawaiian Planter*, describing early Hawaiian farming life, and *The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u, Hawaii.* The latter, which includes some of Kawena's recollections from childhood, provides a fascinating picture of old-style Hawaiian life, the customs, beliefs, relationships and traditions of the people of her rugged homeland.

Kawena officially joined the Bishop Museum staff in 1937 and continued her work there until 1962, translating, writing, researching and making numerous field trips. In addition to her work at the museum, Kawena was busily engaged in many other activities, including raising a family.

The marriage of Kawena and Kaloli'i Pukui was childless for many years, so they welcomed into their home two *hanai* children. The first was a baby girl of Japanese ancestry whose parents had died in the influ-

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enza epidemic of 1920. Kawena's father, Henry, gave the baby the English name Patience, and Pa'ahana gave her the Hawaiian name Namakauahoa-o-Kawena, "The haughty eyes of Kawena." Their second *hanai* daughter, a child of Hawaiian-Japanese ancestry, was named Faith. In 1931, the Pukuis had a child of their own, a daughter called Pele in honor of the ancestral fire goddess.

Their daughter Patience Bacon is now administrative assistant to the Bishop Museum's anthropology department chairman. She recalls what it was like growing up in the household of three generations: Kawena's parents, Pa'ahana and Henry, Kawena and Kaloli'i and the three children. "The household was very family-oriented and we always had a house full of *'ohana.* We would go back to the Big Island every summer to visit the relatives. We spoke English at home, but when we'd speak to the grandaunts and granduncles, we'd converse in Hawaiian so they could understand. We kids were kind of forced to speak the language to communicate with them."

While she grew up in a home imbued with Hawaiian culture and customs, at the time she didn't think it was anything remarkable. "If you're around this influence all the time, you're not conscious of it, but you're absorbing things. We had respect for Hawaiian beliefs. We had *ho'oponopono* when the family thought it was needed. That was one of the things we took for granted."

Still, she never took her mother's work for granted. "I think all along I've been involved in Mother's work, consciously since I was about 15. She could take shorthand—in Hawaiian—but she never learned to type, so from my teens on I would do her typing. I learned a great deal while doing it."

Kawena's work at the museum was interrupted by World War II, when she spent a couple of years in charge of a camouflage unit, which she referred to as being in the "deceiving business." Pat Bacon recalls participating during that time in a hula troupe her mother organized among the camouflage workers to entertain servicemen.

Kawena passed along to her daughters her lifelong love of hula and chant. She had studied them first under her grandmother and mother, and then with some of the outstanding *kumu hula* of the time, notably

Keahi Luahine. She was the grand-aunt of famed dancer Iolani Luahine, who later became one of many renowned dancers to study under Kawena.

In addition to teaching hula, Kawena often lectured on it and, for a time, she also taught Hawaiian culture and music at Punahou School. On many occasions, she took her daughters along to demonstrate the dances while she did the drumming and chanting.

Her daughter, Pele Pukui Suganuma, who became a well-known chanter, dancer and teacher of hula, died in 1979. Daughters Faith Ukushima and Pat Bacon live in Honolulu and, until her hospitalization three years ago, Kawena, who was widowed in 1943, made her home with Pat and her husband, photographer George Bacon.

Over the years, Kawena co-authored several works, including two books of Hawaiian legends and a collection of chants and poems from ancient to modern times. *The Echo of Our Song—Chants and Poems of the Hawaiians* ends with a chant she composed.

She has composed numerous Hawaiian songs, as well as chants. In fact, she won the Parks and Recreation Department's Hawaiian Song Contest for so many years, they finally asked her to stop entering.

She also taught the Hawaiian language. Among her adult students were two men who offered her great encouragement in her work: Kenneth Emory, then chairman of the Bishop Museum anthropology department, and UH linguist Samuel Elbert, with whom she would later co-author the book *Place Names of Hawaii* (with Esther Mookini) and the definitive dictionary of the Hawaiian language.

For decades she had been collecting a massive file of Hawaiian words and their various meanings, uses and translations. Years more of dedicated effort, working with Elbert, bore fruit with the *Hawaiian Dictionary* (first published as the *Hawaiian-English Dictionary* in 1957). Containing about 25,000 entries, it was vastly more comprehensive than any that had preceded it.

Others' earlier efforts at a Hawaiian dictionary were limited in scope, not only in number of words, but sometimes also in the selection of words deemed "acceptable." The Rev. Lorrin Andrews, in his 1836 dictionary, studiously expurgated from the language all words he considered vulgar or sensual.

No doubt with this missionary's work in mind, the unflinching authors of the Pukui-Elbert dictionary in the preface express their views of the lexicographer's obligation: "He must not frame condemnatory definitions of customs of which he may not privately approve, nor on the other hand may he glorify the past or purge from it what he may deplore. Nor may he blanch at risque terms. In short, he is a reporter and in his role of lexicographer he never takes the part of teacher, innovator or purist."

It was during the time Kawena was working on the dictionary that she met Eleanor Williamson, who was to become her friend, colleague and traveling companion on many field trips. Now an assistant in anthropology at the Bishop Museum, Ele Williamson went there originally in the early 1950s as a volunteer. She recalls: "At the time, I was doing work for Kenneth Emory in anthropology, listening to tape recordings of chants and trying to find written sources for them. Kawena, whose

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office was nearby, would poke her head in to see what I was doing. She would listen to the chants with interest, then come back and give me the written versions of them. She was fantastic! She not only knew the old chants on the tapes, she knew the voices—some of them were contemporaries of her grandmother and mother."

Ele Williamson joined the museum staff full time in 1958 and, the following year, armed with tape recorder, she began her travels with Kawena, doing field work on the Big Island. She recalls that Kawena, Hawaiian style, did not like to ask direct questions in interviews. Instead, in her flawlessly fluent Hawaiian, sprinkled with sayings familiar to her interviewees, she would start a friendly conversation and the information would begin to flow in return—the people's knowledge of the land, stories, sayings, customs.

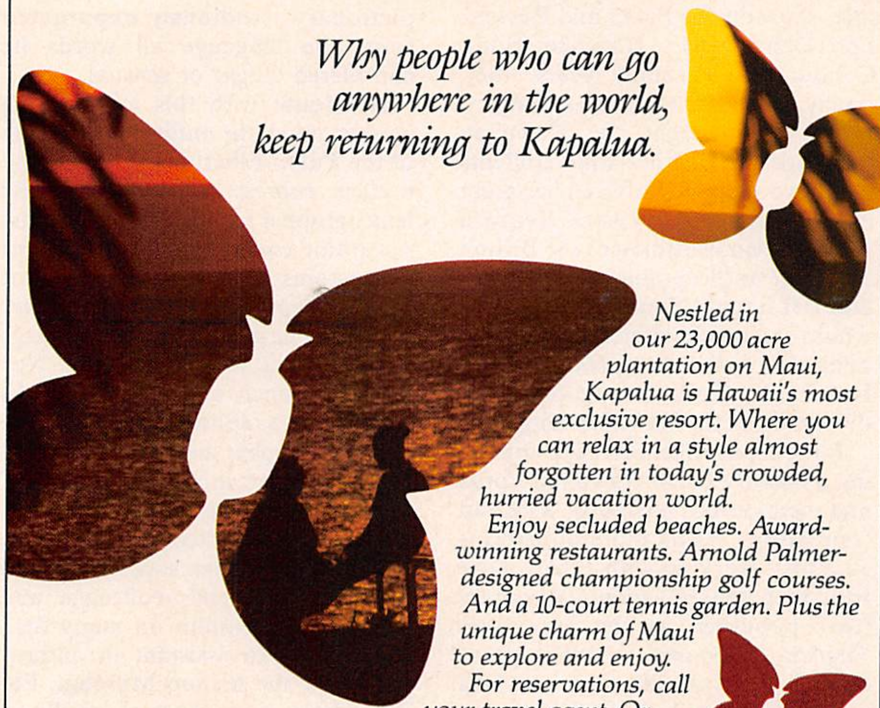
"When it came to learning anything or getting information about Hawaii, Kawena was tireless. The recording sessions sometimes seemed endless to me and I would worry about having enough tape. Her interest was so deep that time meant nothing. And those she was talking with—many of whom were related to her or knew her relatives—became equally involved with the conversation.

"Our field work was in the Puna and Volcano areas, but, of course, we had to go to Ka'u, her home. Kawena, returning to Ka'u, had tears in her eyes, looking up at the hillside, recalling her grandmother and family. She has always loved Ka'u.

"I learned so much from her. She was a marvelous teacher, someone to be loved and respected. She was humorous, too. She is unique—I don't like to use that word because it's so often used inappropriately, but it's true of her."

Their years of field work together took them to all the Islands except Niihau, recording Hawaiian lore along the way. From their travels, there is a wealth of historic material on tape at the museum. Kawena called Ele Williamson "*ku'u hoa a na kai ewalu*—my companion of the eight seas"—a reference to the channels of the Islands.

Kawena's retirement from Bishop Museum in 1962 was simply the closing of one door and the opening of another. The Queen Liliuokalani Children's Center, a social service agency established by the Liliuoka-



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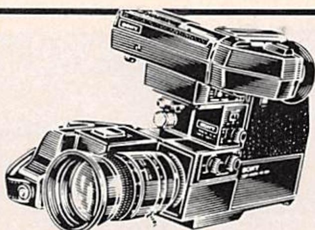

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lani Trust, sought her advice as a consultant to aid them in counseling troubled Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian children and their families. She began as a volunteer for what she assumed would be a brief association. Then, typically, she became deeply involved and ended up working with the center for several years, into her 80s, until health problems forced her to stop.

With the center's staff she shared her knowledge of Hawaiian customs, beliefs and values that were still influencing many Hawaiians' lives then. As Kawena explained the concepts and attitudes underlying Hawaiian traditional practices, it gave psychiatric and social workers at the center insights they could apply in helping Hawaiian clients.

From this came two volumes titled *Nana I Ke Kumu* (Look to the Source), with Kawena Pukui as senior author, in collaboration with Dr. E.W. Haertig, the center's psychiatrist consultant, and Catherine Lee. The books explore ways the cultural past affects lives in the present and point out traditional concepts that are valuable and applicable today, such as the great Hawaiian family therapy, *ho'oponopono.* The books are intended to bridge a gap of understanding and create a better appreciation of the Hawaiian culture.

The title, *Nana I Ke Kumu*, could very well be applied to Kawena. In the foreword to Vol. II, Betty Rocha of the center's staff writes of Kawena, "To us, she has been the very personification of *kumu*, a bubbling spring that we have returned to again and again in our quest."

Many others, as well, have looked to her as a *kumu*, a seemingly inexhaustible source of information

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and, through the years, she has freely given of her time and knowledge.

Many have come to her seeking translations, and particularly for her knack of translating Hawaiian poetry into English, or vice versa, while retaining the meaning, the feeling and the poetic rhythm. Performers have come to her for advice on Hawaiian pronunciation or hula interpretation. She has often worked with musicians, helping them compose songs in Hawaiian.

There was also a steady stream of phone calls seeking her consultation. This eventually got out of hand, according to her daughter, Pat Bacon. "Everybody was always calling Mother and asking about genealogies. Mother also got a lot of calls from people wanting her to select a Hawaiian name for a baby—or even a horse or cat! Sometimes they'd call from the Neighbor Islands and reverse the charges. It got so that she couldn't even sit down to dinner in peace, and she was too gracious to say 'I'm busy' or 'I'm eating now.' She'd give them the information they wanted while her dinner got cold. We finally stopped listing her number."

Perhaps Kawena empathized with those callers because of her own perpetual thirst for knowledge. The introduction to the new book, *'Olelo No'eau*, quotes a tape recording Kawena made of her own thoughts in 1965: "I am now exchanging knowledge with those interested in the Hawaiians themselves, their thinking patterns, the why of their behavior. I tell them of the old and they tell me of the new and together we learn. I like to learn, even if I am over three score and 10... Because I know my mother's language, I've enjoyed exchanging thoughts with other Polynesians to discover our alikenesses and our differences. And because I know my father's, I can explain to others what we have had here and lost and what we still retain."

Kawena has always appreciated her dual heritage and bilingual upbringing, since that is what enables her to see from both sides, Hawaiian and English, and to convey traditional Hawaiian thoughts in English so they could be understood today by those not versed in the culture.

Though she never went to college, Kawena has received honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Hawaii and Brigham Young University-Hawaii. She has been hailed as a Living Treasure of Hawaii by the

Honpa Hongwanji Mission for her accomplishments. Among the many honors she has received are the Governor's Award of the Order of Distinction for Cultural Leadership from the State Council on Hawaiian Heritage and the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, the Hawaii Aloha Award from the Hawaiian Music Foundation, the Outstanding Hawaiian Award from the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs and the Outstanding Contribution Award from the National Society of Arts and Letters. Countless other organizations have paid tribute to her achievements, as well.

While all the honors pleased Kawena, she has always been very modest about them and has taken them in her stride. Says longtime associate Ele Williamson, "She would much rather have an accumulation of translations than an accumulation of awards."

Kawena's 88 years have been years of dramatic change for Hawaii. Both Pat Bacon and Ele Williamson believe this has spurred her on in her translating and writing, giving her a sense of urgency about preserving and transmitting knowledge from the past before it was lost for all time.

Says Williamson: "She gained her knowledge right from the source, from her grandmother. Kawena said that her descendants would be 'book-learning Hawaiians.' She wrote so that younger generations could learn from her, and she was writing not just for Hawaiians, but to share with others."

Kawena has eight grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren. Pat Bacon speculates that the great-grandchildren are the ones for whom Kawena's writings will be especially meaningful, since they are further

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removed from the source and from the traditions of the past.

"Mother would say, 'You talk from your own house'—meaning Ka'u, when and how she was raised, her time. She said, 'What I grew up with, young people don't have today and if I don't write it down, who's going to do it?' She wanted future generations in Hawaii to share the knowledge of the past and, like her, look back with understanding and appreciation."

Her crowning achievement, *'Olelo No'eau: Hawaiian Proverbs and Poetical Sayings*, is her gift of aloha for those who have come before and those who are to follow.

Because of Kawena's long, happy and productive association with the Bishop Museum, the publication of this book is a most appropriate way for the Bishop Museum Press, one of the oldest scholarly presses in the United States, to celebrate its 90th anniversary. In support of the book's significant contribution to Hawaiian culture and as an expression of admiration for Mary Kawena Pukui, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs provided a $30,000 grant toward its publication. Handsomely illustrated by Dietrich Varez and designed by Barbara Pope, the book is itself a thing of beauty, as well as a treasury of Hawaiian thought and expression.

Kawena's daughter lived up to her name, Patience, in her role in compiling the nearly 3,000 sayings collected by her mother over the years. Ele Williamson assisted in the compilation, and, as senior editor of the book, wrote its introduction.

Pat Bacon points out that, because the book contains many expressions that have never before been published, it will, as the *Hawaiian Dictionary* was earlier, be of great help to

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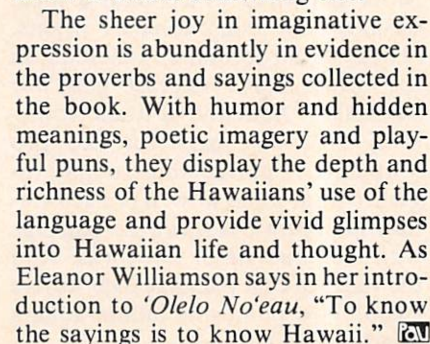
translators in the future.

That undoubtedly is true, but, beyond that, the book holds great appeal for the general reader. The proverbs and sayings, as explained by Kawena in the context of Hawaiian culture, offer fascinating insights into Hawaiian thought, attitudes, values and way of life. Ranging from pungent to poetic, from witty to wise, they also illustrate the ingenuity of the Hawaiians in the use of their expressive language. Many of the sayings have multiple layers of meaning. This was part of the Hawaiians' joy and skill with the language—something Kawena tuned in to at a young age.

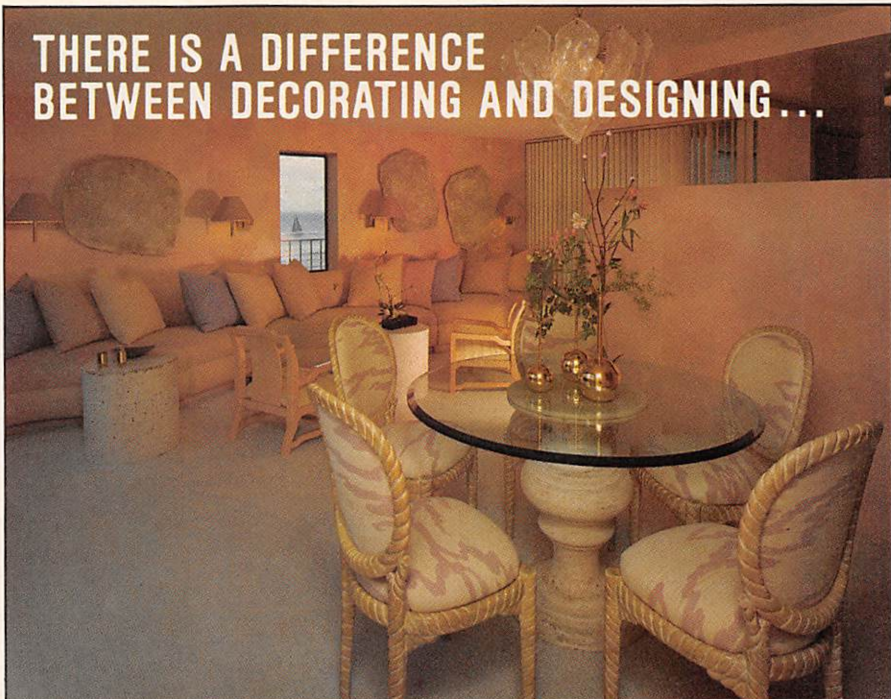
In *The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u, Hawaii*, she wrote: "How I remember listening to the Hawaiians of my childhood! Skilled were they in using the *'olelo ho'opilipili* [figurative speech and simile]... Such choice of words! Poetic and beautiful and never offensive—even when directed at a person's faults. The point of the dart was so well wrapped in the velvet of fine speech that it left not even a tiny prick."

Verbal indirection, with the softening cushion of figurative speech or plays on words, was the tactful way to deliver criticism, accusation or insult. The point would be made, since the *kaona* or hidden meaning was clearly understood. In Hawaii, ridicule and insult attained a high art form, as many of the sayings in *'Olelo No'eau* attest.

The Hawaiians also had fun with all kinds of sexual innuendo, expressed in metaphor, euphemism and pun. This form of verbal fun became especially entertaining after the arrival of the missionaries, who learned the Hawaiian language, but didn't understand the *kaona*. The Hawaiians took delight in sayings and songs with a hidden meaning. On the surface they may appear to be about something as innocuous as a bird or a canoe, but, as Kawena put it, "When all the Hawaiians start giggling, you know it means something else."



The sheer joy in imaginative expression is abundantly in evidence in the proverbs and sayings collected in the book. With humor and hidden meanings, poetic imagery and playful puns, they display the depth and richness of the Hawaiians' use of the language and provide vivid glimpses into Hawaiian life and thought. As Eleanor Williamson says in her introduction to *'Olelo No'eau*, "To know the sayings is to know Hawaii." ▣



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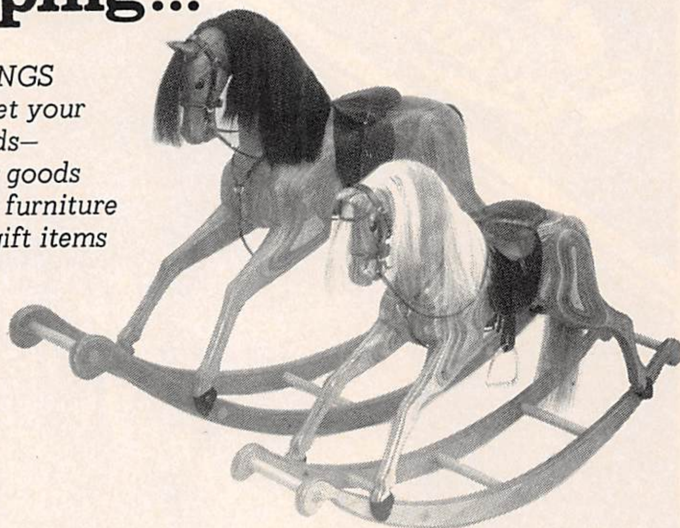

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